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Parliamentary Human Rights Group

Statement by Lord Avebury, chairman of the United Kingdom Parliamentary Human Rights Group, on his arrival in Lisbon, September 4

I have come to Portugal as the chairman of the United Kingdom Parliamentary Human Rights Group, which numbers some 100 Members of all Parties in both Houses of Parliament, and I speak in the name of 200 Members of the Parliaments of the ten EEC countries who, earlier this year, issued a declaration calling for the self-determination of the people of East Timor.

In East Timor there is flagrant and continuing abuse of human rights. The suffering inflicted on the people has been described as genocide, and compared with the tragedy of Kampuchea. Though the scale is smaller, as many as a third of the population of the territory may have perished as a result of the Indonesian invasion. At least 100,000 have been killed, and possibly even as many as 200,000.

The people of East Timor did not choose to be incorporated into Indonesia. After nearly eight years of foreign occupation, their resistance continues on a scale big enough to worry the aggressors. It is not just isolated guerrilla groups; Fretilin has an organised support network among the civilian population throughout the territory. This is why Indonesia broke off the talks with Fretilin, which began last March, and resorted to force again in a vain attempt to impose control. The military commander has announced the biggest offensive against the people of East Timor for four years, inflicting grave hardship and suffering on the whole population.

I have come to Portugal because Britain, like the other members of the European Community, recognises Portugal's responsibility for bringing about genuine decolonisation in East Timor. Last year at the United Nations I spoke in support of Portugal's initiative in sponsoring the successful resolution on East Timor, and the main purpose of my visit now is to discuss the most effective ways of backing your further moves when the issue again comes before the General Assembly in October.

I am impressed by the seriousness with which the problem of East Timor is taken in Portugal, as shown by the readiness of President Eanes to make time to see me, and the appointments I have been given with the Foreign Minister and the President of the Parliament. I hope to meet other Members of Parliament, and in particular to hold discussions with the Special Commission on East Timor when it is reappointed on September 14. I shall also

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be meeting members of the Timorese community in Lisbon, including representatives of Fretilin, and the former Apostolic Adninistrator of East Timor, Mgr Martinho da Costa Lopes.

Our aim is to enable the people of East Timor to choose their future for themselves, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and in conformity with Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which says that:-

> "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status."

I know that this basic human right was central to the 25 April here in Portugal, and that Portugal is working hard to secure the same right for the people of East Timor. Portugal has appealed to the UN. Fretilin, from inside East Timor, has appealed to the UN. Only Indonesia seems deaf to the voice of world opinion, and impervious to arguments based soundly on internationally agreed instruments. Even Australia, which has been sympathetic to Indonesia in the past, has expressed concern about the military activity in East Timor. I hope that all civilised nations will protest against the infliction of yet more suffering, and will back Portugal in her efforts to achieve a peaceful solution on the basis of the United Nations resolution of November 1982.